

Sports Opinion

ND tradition top in college football



Joshua Camenzind

SOUTH BEND, Ind. – While many students went back to their hometowns, tried to catch up on sleep or just plain slept, I decided I would spend my fall break driving more than 1,400 miles to see a football game.

But this was no ordinary football game. This was Notre Dame vs. Southern Cal. The game represents one of the most storied rivalries in college football.

South Bend, home of the Fighting Irish, is considered by many to be the mecca of college football. Count me in as one of them.

Let's get one thing straight first of all: I have never been a fan of the Irish and probably never will be. I arrived at Notre Dame cheering for USC, but I left South Bend on Saturday night with a newfound appreciation of the tradition that envelops ND. The atmosphere blows a person away. Touchdown Jesus, the Golden

Dome, the band (in its 112th year) and its fans provide a perfect setting for college football.

Festivities began on Friday night when the majority of fans arrived on campus.

Somewhere around 30 students painted the players' helmets gold on Friday afternoon in the stadium, leaving a perfect view for the fans strolling by. The helmets are re-painted every game to ensure that they sparkle for kickoff.

A pep rally on Friday night was held in the Joyce Center. The students, fans and alumni (around 10,000) had the place rocking like no other. While it was wild at first, the place exploded when the band arrived playing the "Notre Dame Victory March."

Friday, Irish Coach Bob Davie invited a special guest to the game. His name: Wayne Gretzky. That's right, the Great One was standing less than 200 feet away speaking of how he wished he could have gone to Notre Dame. A pep rally with Gretzky or Tom Green? You make the call.

The Irish players walked in behind Gretzky, in suit and tie (not baggy sweats and turned-back hats). The team entered the game at 3-3, but the Irish played with heart for the university they love. And they showed it against USC.

In addition to the pep rally, there was the Notre Dame basketball "Friday Night Live." New Coach Matt Doherty (formerly an assistant at Kansas) held his team's first practice before a couple thousand students and fans. Doherty invited ESPN analyst Dick Vitale to speak, and Tommy Hilfiger coached one of the teams in the intra-squad scrimmage.

Arriving in South Bend on Saturday morning was nothing like being in Nebraska on gameday. Notre Dame takes things a notch higher, and

the people are like a family. Once you are Irish, there is no turning back.

Entering the gates before the game, ushers greet each spectator saying, "Welcome to Notre Dame. I hope you enjoy the game." It gives ND the family setting that makes people feel welcome.

Notre Dame Stadium is a far cry from Memorial Stadium. But that is not said negatively. Notre Dame Stadium is not plastered with advertising – in fact only one ad is visible (NBC). There are no skyboxes, no replay boards and there is no mega sound system.

You will never hear the Rolling Stones, Orgy or the Beastie Boys in the stadium – just the noise made by the band and the student section that put NU's versions to shame.

ND's student section begins on the 50-yard line and extends around through two sections of the end zone – not the 25-yard line. Students get prime seats, as they should for their support. ND's student allotment for tickets is 11,000 with an enrollment of just over 10,000.

USC led early, 21-0, but the Irish started to come back in the third when the rain drowned out the Trojan passing game. ND won 25-24.

After every game all the fans join around the shoulders and sway arm in arm to the band playing.

South Bend is also home to the College Football Hall of Fame. I visited it after the game and completed an awesome day of college football.

All true college football fans must visit South Bend – I just hope that I can go back next season when the Irish play host to the Cornhuskers on Sept. 9.

Joshua Camenzind is a sophomore news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan staff writer.

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